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French Socialists Seek to of Alleged Master Spy

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PARIS — The Socialist government of President Francois Mitterrand has reopened the investigation into Henri Curiel's murder, an apparently politically motivated killing that has become entangled in international controversy about Soviet "disinformation" and intelligence penetration in the West.

The saintly victim of a new "Dreyfus affair" frame-up to his friends, to his enemies Curiel was a redoubtable Soviet spymaster and terrorist boss extraordinaire. He was killed here by two gunmen May 4, 1978, and efforts by supporters to identify and punish his killers long languished.

But with two Socialist ministers on a committee determined to clear his name and officials in Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy's entourage swearing to get to the bottom of the murder this fall, Curiel's friends see new hope.

Since Mitterrand's election in May, persistent reports, which government officials decline to deny outright, suggest that the outgoing members of the administration of Valery Giscard d'Estaing took all sensitive files on Curiel with them.

The assassination of Curiel, born in Egypt in 1914 the son of rich Italian-born Jews, is one of half a dozen mysterious, apparently political killings that occurred during the presidency of Giscard that the Socialists are pursuing out of a sense of justice, a desire for political change and, perhaps most importantly, an instinct for political survival, according to Socialist Party insiders.

Curiel ran an organization here that he called a charitable institution designed to help people working against undemocratic Third World governments. But his accusers say it was a cover for subversive activities.

The Socialists are moving now to establish their control over the French intelligence establishment, which is suspected of having leaked allegations against Curiel to the French press. Some influential Socialists privately fear that they could fall victim to the kind of extreme right-wing politics that they are convinced brought about the leaks and Curiel's death.

The Socialists have also found suggestions in the files they inherited that, ironically, the Third World contacts Curiel fostered may have served Western intelligence at least as much as they aided Soviet objectives. Curiel's organization "was penetrated by so many intelligence organizations that they all lost an incredible element of control, of tracing information, which is the bread and butter of the business, when Curiel was killed," said a Socialist intelligence expert who, like most professionals in his line of work, asked that he not be identified.

For an alleged member of the world of espionage, surprisingly much is known about Curiel's origins and activities. As a young man in Egypt, Curiel became a Communist and spent two years in King Farouk's concentration camps for his beliefs before being deported in 1951.

Curiel, who was educated in French-run Catholic missionary schools in Cairo, entered France illegally and lived there clandestinely until he was arrested in 1960 for helping Algerian nationalists fighting for independence against France.

Released, but still stateless and with an expulsion order hanging over his head, Curiel became what his Israeli left-wing friend Uri Avneri called "a one-man revolutionary clearing house and contractor for revolutionary causes."

"What angers me about the charges against Curiel is they contain just enough truth to make the lies convincing," Avneri said in a re-

Curiel's many friends assert that had he really been an agent for the KGB or otherwise engaged in subversion, as has been charged, the French police and intelligence establishment would have quickly brought him to book. Curiel's defenders see instead a pattern of official tolerance for his activities stemming during the 1960s from the fact that his aims in the Third World and those of the ruling Gaullists coincided. The more conservative governments that succeeded Charles de Gaulle were divided, with some ministries still favorable, but others increasingly hostile to Curiel's activities.

The most tangible indication of Socialist determination in the case came when the new government gave Curiel's widow and lawyer an official file that the Giscard government had refused to release.

The file included a judgment by a special government commission that cleared Curiel of wrongdoing, rejecting an Interior Ministry charge that he had used his Third World-oriented voluntary organization Solidarite — later renamed Aide et Amitie — for subversion in France and abroad and in aiding terrorism.

French courts, moreover, lately have ruled in favor of Curiel's widow and friends and associates whose names were mentioned in connection with his and who have brought libel cases.

Last month a Paris court considered such charges and Curiel's alleged KGB connection as described in a book entitled "The Curiel Network or Humanitarian Subversion," and found its author, Roland Gaucher, guilty in a libel suit brought by Rose Curiel, the widow, Curiel's longtime associate Joyce Blau and France, Terre d'Asile (France, Country of Asylum), an organization helping political refugees here.

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